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ABSTRACT

Control over environmental events has been shown to reduce the behavioral and psychological impact of environmental stress. To assess the effect of residence hall judicial policies on attitudes toward rule violating behavior, 93 college freshmen (36 males, 56 females, 1 unreported), randomly assigned to one of four dormitories (social contract or student authority; external or no student authority; or two control dormitories), completed a self-report questionnaire on attitudes toward rule violating behavior. In the social contract dormitory students rotated participation on a hearing board; in the external authority dormitory rule enforcement decisions were made by the hall director; and in the two control dormitories rule enforcement was the responsibility of the student hall staff. The attitude measure was administered in the fall and spring of the school year. An analysis of the results showed that students who were given control over their dormitory judicial systems expressed attitudes less tolerant of role violating behaviors (destructive activities, alcohol/drug activities, and disruptive activities) than did students having no control over rule enforcement. The findings provide evidence that attitudes can be effected through modeling the social environment and fostering a sense of personal control. (BL)

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THE EFFECT OF RESIDENCE HALL JUDICIAL POLICIES ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS RULE VIOLATING BEHAVIORS

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The Effect of Residence Hall Judicial Policies on Attitudes towards Rule Violating Behaviors

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As part of a longitudinal study of legal socialization, students given control over their dormitory judicial system expressed attitudes less tolerant of rule violating behaviors than students having no control over rule enforcement. The practical implications of this finding are interpreted within the context of social learning and control theory.

Concern about campus crime and disruptiveness is on the rise. Parents and alumni demand action, administrators revise rules and regulations, and students are left to cope with a potentially volatile situation. Social learning theory (Aronfreed, 1969; Bandura, 1969, 1973; Berkowitz, 1962, 1964; Rotter, 1954) and control theory (deCharms, 1968; Langer, 1975; White, 1959) are employed in the present study to provide both a theoretical understanding of, and a potential solution to this problem.

A college or university residence hall is an ideal laboratory for studying the process of social learning. Each fall, students from many different backgrounds are thrown together with the expectation that somehow they will all learn to live with each other. A crucial aspect of this

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learning process is the development of group norms concerning attitudes and behaviors that are acceptable to the group (Whitely, Bertin, & Berry, 1980). It was reasoned that an important environmental element influencing the social learning process in an institutional setting such as a dormitory was the degree of control students had over the functioning of their dormitory judicial system. Control over environmental events has been shown to have positive behavioral and psychological consequences among the institutionalized elderly (Langer & Rodin, 1976; Rodin & Langer, 1977; Schulz, 1976), in reducing the impact of environmental stress (Averill, 1973; Houston, 1972; Lefcourt, 1973), and in responding to illness and medical intervention (Thompson, 1981). This formed the basis for the assessment in the present study of four different dormitory judicial policies as a critical element of a three year longitudinal study of the process of legal socialization (Cohn & White, 1980).

It was hypothesized that students given control over their dormitory judicial system (Social Contract) would develop attitudes less tolerant of rule violating behaviors than students who had no control (External Authority). Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the attitudes of students living in two control dormitories would differ from those expressed in either the Social Contract or External Authority dormitories.

Method

Subjects: Ninety-three (93) freshman undergraduates (36 males, 56 females, 1 did not report) at a medium sized North Eastern university participated in the present study. All students were members of the Class of 1985, matriculating the Fall Semester 1981. In cooperation with the Office of Residential Life (ORL) the students were randomly assigned to the four dormitories involved in the study. The subjects were part of a related campus-wide longitudinal study of legal socialization (Cohn & White, 1980).

Procedure: Students in the Social Contract dormitory participated on a rotating basis on a dormitory hearing board. The purpose of this board was to decide on the setting and enforcement of rules (within certain limits imposed by ORL regulations and State and Federal law). In the External Authority dormitory decisions about rule enforcement were made exclusively by the Hall Director, an ORL employee. The two control dormitories operated according to usual ORL policies, which place the responsibility of rule enforcement on the student Hall Staff.

Attitudes towards 29 rule violating behaviors were assessed using a self-report questionnaire. Each attitude was measured on a separate 7-point Likert scale (0=complete disapproval, 3=neutral, 6=complete approval). The subjects' attitudes were pretested at the beginning of the Fall Semester at a required dormitory orientation meeting the

evening of their first day on campus. The attitude posttest occurred mid-way through the Spring Semester. The subjects were contacted by mail or in person, completed the questionnaire again, and returned the completed questionnaire by mail to the experimenters.

Results: Data from the 1981-1982 academic year only was used in the present analyses. VARIMAX rotated factor analyses of the pretest and posttest measures yielded equivalent three factor solutions. These factors were labeled: 1). Destructive Activities; 2). Alcohol/Drug Activities; and 3). Disruptive Activities. The four variables that loaded on each factor were chosen as the dependent variables in the analyses that followed, and are listed in Table 1.

The effect of residence hall judicial policy was analyzed using a 1-way MANCOVA, with the fall pretest as the covariate. The within-cell regression (covariate) analysis was significant at the multivariate level, $F(144,852) = 1.641$, $p = .0001$. All but three univariate tests were significant at the $p<.02$ level (see Table 1).

The remaining analyses involved planned comparisons between the four dormitories (see Table 1). The first comparison contrasted the two control dormitories as a test of random assignment of students to the dormitories. This comparison did not achieve achieve multivariate significance, $F(12,60) = 1.562$, $p = .128$. The second comparison contrasted the Social Contract and External

Authority dormitories. This comparison achieved multivariate significance, $F(12,60) = 2.097$, $p = .031$. While only the variable concerning drinking in one's own dormitory room achieved univariate significance, the difference was in the predicted direction. The final comparison contrasted the pooled control dormitories with the pooled experimental dormitories. This comparison was significant at the multivariate level, $F(12,60) = 1.977$, $p = .043$. Two Alcohol/Drug and three Destructive variables achieved univariate significance. The subjects in the control dormitories showed a greater degree of acceptance of rule violating behaviors than did the subjects in the experimental dormitories. These findings confirmed the present hypotheses.

Discussion

The present study provides evidence that attitudes about the acceptability of destructive and disruptive acts, and alcohol and drug abuse can be effected through modeling the social environment and fostering a sense of personal control. Both the Social Contract and External Authority dormitories became less tolerant of rule violations than did the control dormitories. This constitutes the effect of social learning (Aronfreed, 1969; Bandura, 1969, 1973; Berkowitz, 1962, 1964; Rotter, 1954), as the subjects in both experimental dormitories had increased opportunities for modeling peer behavior reflecting rule following.

However, the motives for rule following differed in the Social Contract and External Authority dormitories. The data from the External Authority dormitory indicates that students can be coerced into complying with increasingly strict regulations. What has yet to be ascertained is the extent to which this short-term compliance has resulted in long-term attitude internalization (Kelman, 1961).

In the Social Contract dormitory, the motive for rule following was based on fostering a sense of personal responsibility through giving the students increased control over their immediate environment (deCharms, 1968; Langer, 1975; White, 1959). As a result of having to run their own judicial system, the subjects in the Social Contract dormitory presented themselves with increased opportunities for modeling rule following. This resulted in attitudes that were equivalent to, and in one case exceeded, the rejection of rule violation reported in the External Authority dormitory.

The implication of these results for college/university administrators is that student compliance with regulations can be assured if sufficient enforcement practices are employed. This means increased costs for those faced with the responsibility of enforcing the rules (Glasser, 1972). However, increasingly prosocial student attitudes can be fostered by structuring the environment to encourage self-control, personal responsibility, and mutual accountability.

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Table 1

MANCOVA of Residence Hall Judicial Policy

Source	Test of Roots	df Hypothesis	df Error	F	p
(A) Within cells regression	1 - 12	144	532	1.837	.000
	2 - 12 [1]	121	513	1.340	.007
(B) Social Contract versus External Authority	1 - 1	12	60	2.097	.031
(C) Pooled experimental versus Pooled Control	1 - 1	12	60	1.977	.043
(D) Control 1 versus Control 2	1 - 1	12	60	1.562	.128

Univariate Tests of Significance

Variable	A F(12,71)	B F(1,71)	C F(1,71)
Drink in dorm	3.256***	.369	1.515
Drink in room	2.528***	7.090***	4.979*
Being drunk	4.824***	2.278	5.082*
Smoke marijuana	6.872**	.896	.834
Loud stereo	2.290***	3.181	3.909
Loud party in room	4.349***	.036	1.569
Loud noise in room	3.569***	2.378	.105
Play hall sports	3.928***	3.023	.216
Discharge fire extinguisher	1.244	.035	5.778**
Set off false fire alarms	.647	.255	4.228*
Break furniture	.493	.092	4.518*
Fight in dorm	3.646***	.146	2.163

[1] = No further multivariate tests achieved significance.
* = p<.05
** = p<.02
*** = p<.01